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AUTHOR Bhaerman, Bob
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ABSTRACT

Dr. Lessinger's position of accountability (see ED040 155) seems to be within a very limited view of the function cf the school. Nct all educators are well adjusted to the status quo; some hold that the school shall build a new social order. Dr. Lessinger seems to say that teachers should be accountable for the training ccmpcnent but not the mcre important education component. Teachers want tc knew what he means. Regarding the "basic skills cf reading," the issue is not that teachers have failed to teach the basic skills but that they often have not been made aware or given the proper tccls, materials, and preservice and inservice training to do the job. The difference between Dr. Iessinger's paradigm for accountability and that in AFT Quest Paper #12 (ED041 870) is that his is based cn the simplistic dichotomy of success or failure whereas ours is based on the more complex notion of identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses and then establishing continuous prcgress prcgrams for them. Dr. Iessinger says that the heart cf the education engineering process is in the performance contract. AFT teachers have passed a resolutien pointing out that performance contrac ing can take the determination of education policy out of the hands of the public, threaten to establish a new monopoly of education, dehumanize the learning process, sow distrust among teachers, prcmote teaching to the "standardized" test, and subvert the collective bargaining process and reduce teacher input. (JS)

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RESPONSE TO LESSINGER:

THE GREAT DAY OF JUDGMENT

by Bob Bhaerman
Director of Research, AFT

"The important criterion will be results -- student learning," Dr. Lessinger has told us this. Yet he ignores the most important questions: What is the major function of the school? And in the light of the major function, what should the results be? What are the kinds of student learnings which should be stressed? In short, what should students learn? The answers depend on how one views social progress and the status quo. On the whole, I think, most educators have their lives pretty well adjusted to the status quo. Most probably resist any major disturbance which would require the redistribution of social energies of so broad a nature as to require a radically new frame of reference. Such extensive revisions -- of school and society -- usually are too precarious for many who call themselves educators.

The individualities of others, however, are so marked that they cannot be made congruent with things as they are. What of the teacher - and his "resulting" students - who cannot abide the status quo? What of the teachers in a school who are the incubators of social unrest and revision? How does one set up the criterion to evaluate the results, that is, of student learning in order to fit this view of education? In short, what does "accountability" mean in terms of this function of the schools? Is the function of schools merely to be a conservative one, the "trailing edge", as Van Cleve Morris has called it? Or to use his term, should schools be at "the growing edge"? What of the teacher whose "results" are in terms of students undertaking acts of social reconstruction? What about those

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students who are undergoing a drastic reorganization of their outlook toward American society? What of those teachers who hold, with George Counts, that the school shall build a new social order? Dr. Lessinger, who would you hold accountable if these teachers succeed?

Your position on accountability seems to be within a very limited view of the function of the school. OK, to qualify your conception of education, you say that "There are and should be larger objectives in education that are difficult to define and impossible to measure as the consequence of any given program." (Therefore, you say that) "The 'training' components of education, illustrated in the basic skills of reading, arithmetic, vocational training, and the like are amenable to performance contracts" -- or, I take it, amenable to your conception of accountability. Are you saying that teachers should be accountable for the "training" component of education, but not the more important "education" component of education? Teachers want to know what you mean. How do you answer the parent who asks "If you don't teach my child, I'm going to have you fired"? Teachers want to know the answer to this too. What do you tell the teacher of reading, or arithmetic, or vocational training, that your chances of being fired are 100% better than the social studies teacher? Your "training" component theory of education leaves an awful lot to be desired. It leaves a lot out. Please, Dr. Lessinger, teachers of history and science and literature demand the equal right of being axed along with the teachers of reading and arithmetic and vocational training. Teachers demand "due process," you see.

Please be more specific in answering the question to be asked on that Great Day of Judgment when teachers names shall be written in the Great Book of Accountability: who shall live and who shall die?

Please forgive me if this sounds a trifle sacrilegious. But then, you did mention something about "Those who live on the earth are stewards of the glorious home God has given." That reference to the diety, I take it, is your ultimate in accountability.

I am afraid that your conception of accountability is nothing more than the old "pie in the sky" or perhaps "pie in the eye" of teachers.

Let's return to the issue of the "basic skills of reading" for a moment. The issue is much more complex than you would have it. For example, Jeanne Chall in Learning to Read summarizes the research evidence about the significant relationship between initial teaching methods and failure to learn to read. She states:

> There is considerable evidence from all the case studies except Robinson's (and she admittedly was not concerned primarily with method) that an initial reading method that emphasized "word," "natural," or "speeded" reading at the start and provided insufficient of inconsistent training in decoding produced more serious reading failures than one that emphasized the code. Three of the authors were firmly convinced that sight methods that inhibit oral responses and other kinds of movements and articulation in their immediate pursuit of smooth, speedy silent reading had caused many of the failures they diagnosed and treated. They concluded that at least some children need to learn the written code for the spoken language in a more systematic way and to be encouraged to use "lower-order" responses such as tracing, writing, pointing, sounding, etc. (pp. 176-77)

My point, you see, is that it is not simply that the teachers have failed to teach "basic skills of reading". Often they have not been made aware or given the proper tools, the materials, and more important, the proper pre-service and in-service training to do the job.

The Encyclopedia of Educational Research reports a national survey conducted by Mary C. Austin and it concluded with these points:

> The preservice preparation of teachers of elementary reading in the United States was judged to be inadequate in many respects. Consequently, twenty-two recommendations were made for strengthening preservice preparation (and) ...more effective in-service programs and other means need to be sought to assist teachers in the field to meet effectively the reading instructional needs of their students. [P.1085.]

The difference, Dr. Lessinger, between your paradigm for accountability and the paradigm in AFT-QuEST Paper #12 is that yours is based on the black-or-white, simplistic dichotomy of "success/or (zap) failure," whereas ours is based on the more complex notion of identifying "strengths/and weaknesses" of teachers and then establishing continuous progress programs for teachers. Your paradigm is based upon the Jehovah-like decree of life/or death, whereas our paradigm is based upon the notions of compassion, humaneness, and human potential.

Your paradigm can be called the "Cult of Adoration," for you seem to worship at the feet of the Almighty Efficiency of Industry, but you seem to ignore the all too frequently recurring corruption of the high priests of the military-industrial and now the educational-industrial comples so aptly illustrated by the highest priest of them all, Lloyd Dorsett of Texarkana fame. How many of these high priests of industry have ever set foot into a classroom and can you honestly say that your Educational Engineers of IBM and Borg-Warner and the like know more about the teaching-learning process and "kids" than the Educational Workers of Gary and Pittsburgh and the District of Columbia? I will take the Educational Workers over the Educational Engineers any day.

You say that "The heart of the education engineering process is the performance contract." I have some more questions for you to answer. They come from over 200,000 teachers of the AFT whose representatives passed a

resolution at our recent convention with seven points which I shall relay to you in the form of questions:

1. Can you guarantee to us that performance contracting will not take the determination of education policy out of the hands of the public? (Already, the incipient per ormance-contracting lobby is telling school boards that independent contractors should not be tied down by school board policies. "The schools have to be very careful not to put constraints on contractors," the president of QED, Inc., one of the recipients of OEO funds, said recently.)

2. Can you say, with a straight face, that performance contracting does not threaten to establish a new monopoly of education? (While there are currently scores of small private educational corporations interested in performance contracting, the big hardware manufacturers like Westinghouse, Borg-Warner, IBM, and Xerox have set up "educational divisions." With their almost unlimited supply of capital, it is only a matter of time before the performance-contracting industry is in the control of a small group of big businesses which can use it (a) to sell their hardware, and (b) to promote their ideology.)

3. Can you stand up before groups of teachers and convince us that performance contracting does not dehumanize the learning process? (Almost all performance contractors depend on programmed instruction tied to material incentives to motivate students to learn. The attempt to "individualize" learning actually creates a fierce competitiveness among students to see who will get the most money, green stamps, or transistor radios.)

4. Do you believe that performance contracting will not sow distrust among teachers? (It has already...Most performance contractors use a teacher-incentive program. Teachers whose pupils do the "best" on tests get a bonus--often stock in the performance contractor's company. No longer are teachers willing to share their good ideas with one another; to do so might cut back on their earnings.)

5. Can you rationalize that performance contracting does not promote teaching to the "standardized" test? (It has already...The Texarkana performance contract project already is mired in accusations that questions on achievement tests were identical to those specifically taught by the private contractor's staff. As long as tests and scores are the criteria for determining how much the private contractor is to be paid, the dangers of subterfuge, collusion, and teaching to the text are present.)

6. How can you state that performance contracting would not subvert the collective bargaining process and reduce teacher input? (Contracts between teachers and school boards will be replaced by arrangements between private corporations and "their" staffs of teachers and para-professionals. The input of educational expertise from teachers to school-board authorities will be lost. In its place will be substituted any kind of cheap, short-cut method of "teaching" that will make the most money for the contractor.)

7. Is not performance contracting educationally unsound? Is performance contracting not predicated on the false assumption that educational achievement can be improved in the vacuum of a machine-oriented classroom, without changing the wider environment of the poverty-stricken child?